DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 452 914 JC 010 361

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TITLE	A One-Room School for Developmental Studies.
PUB DATE	2001-00-00
NOTE	6p.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Descriptive (141)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Administrator Responsibility; *Developmental Programs; Faculty College Relationship; *Faculty Workload; Full Time Faculty; Noninstructional Responsibility; *Part Time Faculty; *Rural Education; *School Holding Power; Technical Institutes; Two Year Colleges
IDENTIFIERS	*Piedmont Technical College SC

ABSTRACT

Piedmont Technical College's (PTC's) (South Carolina) service area is mostly rural and contains widespread illiteracy, weak economies, sparse education funding, large high-risk populations, and poor educational aspirations and attainment. By 1998, in an effort to provide greater access to its rural population and improve retention efforts, PTC had established six outreach centers. These centers offered developmental English, reading, mathematics, and college skills courses. However, initial student success, retention, and growth in enrollment were limited. Positing that the lack of continuity in part-time instructors did not foster instructor commitment to the college or students, PTC created a position for a "generalist" at two small rural centers, someone who could teach in all developmental content areas as well as admit, test, advise, and register new and returning students. The "one room school house" concept has proven to be the glue that has bonded the students, instructors, and administration. Students at the centers see commitment from the college, consistency in personnel and expectations, and connections between their courses. Retention has improved, instruction is more consistent, less administrative time is spent hiring and training instructors, and the learning environment has been enriched for students and teachers. (PGS)

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A One Room School for Developmental Studies

Piedmont Technical College

Jane T. Rauton and Donna H. Foster

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The Piedmont region of upper South Carolina is mainly rural with widespread illiteracy, weak economies, sparse education funding, large high-risk populations, and poor educational aspirations and attainment. Piedmont Technical College, a comprehensive, open door institution, serves this seven county area. The main campus is located in Greenwood. Geographically, Piedmont's service region is the largest in the technical college system; however, prior to 1990 our enrollment showed little growth. Driving distance, inadequate transportation, and travel time were all reasons potential students in the outlying counties gave as reasons for not attending the college. In an effort to assume a leading role in the economic and human development of its service region, provide greater access to its rural population, and improve retention efforts, Piedmont Technical College began establishing outreach centers in each of the, other six counties served. By 1998, a center was established and operating in each county.

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Committed to long term growth and student retention, the first courses that were offered in each of these centers were developmental English, reading,

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mathematics, and college skills courses. Adjunct instructors with certification in the appropriate content area taught these courses. In many cases the instructors changed from semester to semester, especially in the smaller more rural counties. It was normal for a full time student in developmental studies to have four different part time instructors. Many who taught only one semester and had little loyalty to the college or its students. These conditions did little to foster student success, retention, or growth in enrollment.

Consequently, Developmental studies was like a revolving door, new students entered each semester with only a small number of students returning for the next semester. Turning to the two larger, more established centers and the main campus program for answers to the problem revealed some startling differences. At these larger centers, adjunct instructors in developmental studies taught more than one class, worked more days in the week, and were able to establish a more permanent presence on the campus. They returned to work each semester and could not be identified from full time instructors teaching a course at the county center. They offered services such as tutoring, testing, and performed other administrative duties. Likewise, on the main campus, full time instructors taught in each area, and

student support services were in place. Therefore, the developmental studies department began asking itself how instructor commitment could be transferred to the more rural, smaller, younger centers where enrollment did not warrant the hiring of full-time instructors to perform these services.

The answer came by way of a brain storming session for a Title III grant on improving and standardizing student intake services. The committee, which included a Dean of county centers, the Vice President for Academic Affairs, and the department chair of developmental studies, realizing the need for full time faculty at the county centers decided to create a part-teaching/ part-administrative position for each of the county centers. This position would fund an instructor in an area of greatest need who would also admit, test, advise, and register new and returning students. It was decided that at least one of these positions would be for a "generalist" who could teach in all developmental content areas. A "Jack or Jill" of all trades! In the fall semester 1999, our "Jill," a fulltime developmental instructor was hired to teach developmental English, mathematics, reading and college skills (as needed) at two of the smaller, but geographically close, centers.

The college plans to add similar full time positions in the future at the two remaining centers. The "one room school house" concept has proven to be the "glue" that has bonded the students, instructors, and administration. Students at the small centers see commitment from the college and its instructors, consistency in personnel and expectations, and connections between their courses. By having classes taught by a full time instructor who is also trained to handle administrative duties related to student services, student commitment to the college has grown; therefore, retention has improved. This semester greater than 50% of the students who enrolled and completed developmental course work in the fall have enrolled and are continuing their education. Students no longer see their courses as isolated units of learning but as an integrated, holistic program. For example, reading is no longer important only in reading class, but in English and even math!

Instruction is more consistent. Adjunct, as well as full time instructors, need a consistent schedule term after term. A consistent schedule helps adjunct instructors connect to the college and the center they serve. They become a part of the organizational structure of the college and feel a greater sense of commitment to their curriculum department and from the

administration of the college. Department heads, deans, and vice presidents benefit from the consistency of instructors. They do not have to hire, re-hire, train, and re-train new instructors each term. The presence of a faculty member, full time or full part time, with knowledge of students from the beginning of their college experience, is a valuable resource to other instructors. They have a colleague who can help them determine the best way to help a student learn or who can provide some background information about a student.

With the addition of a developmental instructor who teaches all subjects, a sense of community has developed between students, instructors, and administrators at these two small rural centers. Student reactions to faculty evaluations are more positive. Comments like " the instructor really cares about her students", and "the instructor will help us after class" have appeared on evaluations. The successful start of Piedmont Technical College's "one room school" concept in developmental studies insures the presence of educational opportunity for all citizens in its service area for many years to come - and provides an excellent model for other satellite centers to follow.